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On the edge of 17, but with plenty of adult savvy — gyration-free diva Hilary Duff gets the kids shrieking

By Neva Chonin
CHRONICLE CRITIC AT LARGE

REVIEW

People try to put her down, just because she gets around. Hilary Duff has seen more fame in 16 years than Kim Gordon will in a lifetime. Perhaps this is because Sonic Youth never had a show on the Disney Channel. Duff had such a show, "Lizzie McGuire." She has also had a hit movie, "A Cinderella Story," and a triple-platinum debut album, "Metamorphosis." All these have propelled the spunky blonde teenager into the ranks of the mega-successful, mega-rich and mega-mocked pop upper class at an age when most kids are still trying to get their drivers' licenses.

Her fan base is even younger. As Tuesday's packed show at the Arena in Oakland proved, she is the reigning diva of the preteen, post-toddler set. Britney has grown up and away from childhood, leaving it to Duff to provide clean, gyration-free entertainment to kids who are still years away from understanding a love lyric, much less a sexual reference. She's clean, but not squeakily so. The Hilary experience offers her young audience (average age: 11) glimpses into a future wild with heavy eyeliner and heavier rock, sans Britney's cigarettes and embarrassing boyfriends. It's a sleek and canny package for a conservative time — and make no mistake, Duff is on board for her

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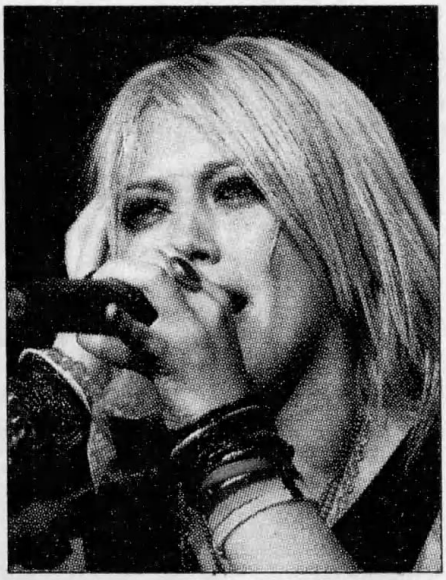

JOHN O'HARA / *The Chronicle*

Hilary Duff performs at the Arena on her North American tour.

Duff1

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Adequate voice is enough for the kids

▶ **DUFF**
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own marketing, not just as product, but as retailer extraordinaire.

She might just have something tangible to sell. In a 70-minute Oakland set that rocked harder than her first album and presaged the rawer pop sound of her second, Duff was as appealing a teen presence as the Runaways-era Joan Jett. Her voice was adequate, albeit heartily supported by three backup singers and occasional over-dubbing; her five-piece band, decked out in Velvet Revolver and Kiss T-shirts, demonstrated real, if derivative chops. Together, borrowing from every rock trope in the book, they turned out a concert that engaged parents even as it enraptured their ceaselessly shrieking children.

Kicking off with "Girls Can Rock" from "A Cinderella Story," a black-clad Duff led her band though most of "Metamorphosis" and part of her forthcoming CD, "Fly", due out Sept. 28 (her 17th birthday). The feathery "Little Voice" and "So Yesterday" went heavy with head-banging guitar solos. The old favorites "Why Not" and "Anywhere But Here" and the newer "Weird" and "Fly" dished out pop-metal riffs, and "Where Did I Go Right?" filled the requisite ballad slot.

At times the mix of influences confounded. "Haters" ("about people who say things that aren't exactly true") sounded like a New York Dolls outtake; the chorus of "Rock This World" mimicked Aerosmith's "Walk This Way"; another new song could have been culled from Smashmouth's catalog. Duff might be unoriginal, but at least she's diverse.

Haylie Duff served as her sister's opening act. Her brief, awkward set introduced her debut CD, including the single, "Screwed," and a song called "The Joke," "about moving out and pursuing our dreams and stuff."

Haylie later joined her sister for an encore of the Go-Go's' "Our Lips Are Sealed." A cover of the Who's "My Generation" followed, with the younger Duff sister wisely tweaking the song's pivotal chorus to "Hope I don't die before I get old." She is, after all, just shy of 17. And her version is just as reflective of her generation as Pete Townshend's was of his, and just as innocent. A pity, though, that she can't write her own anthems. But then, Townshend's never had his own show on the Disney Channel.

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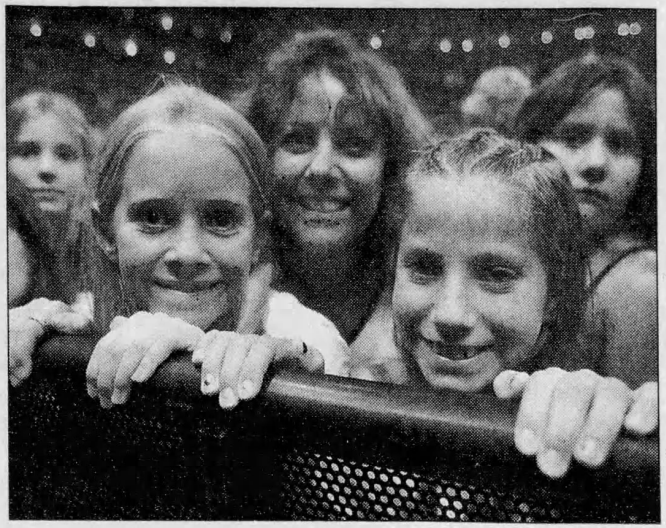

JOHN O'HARA / *The Chronicle*

Young fans and parents were eager to see Hilary Duff perform.

Oscar Wilde's